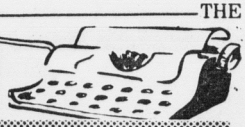
OUR OPINION



Historical Signs Remind Us of Our Past

We heartily endorse the plan of the state to help mark its 300th birthday by erecting historical signs in all of our 67 counties to play up the uniqueness of each.

The state already has 1,400 historical markers along its highways under a program that was begun in 1946. In recent years, the program slowed considerably — partly because the metal signs that once cost $98 now cost about $1,000.

But, as part of the tricentennial, each county will get one new marker, describing its most outstanding characteristic. We hope that local input is allowed in the 11 lines of type that will be put on the cast-aluminum markers. Also, local input should be obtained on where to place them in each county. Such markers should reflect local thought on why each county is unique and where would be the best place to show them off.

The Pennsylvania historical markers are among the finest in the country. They carry the state seal and are done in blue and gold, the state colors. They also are designed to tell, with a minimum of words, stories of why roadside sites have historic importance. While every effort is made to place them as close as possible to the actual places they commemorate, sometimes it is necessary to make common sense adjustments so that they are placed in spots where a goodly number of persons are certain to see them. One can hardly argue with that.

When the state program began in 1946, it was under the direction of Thomas F. Murphy, then the associate editor of this newspaper and also a widely recognized expert in local and state history. He served as chairman of the marker commission under three governors and had direct input in where to place the signs throughout the state. In that capacity, he caused the first such marker in this county to be located at Gouldsboro, recalling the fact that Jay Gould, the famous financier and industrialist, once operated a tannery there. Over the years, he also had much to do with many of the 20 signs that eventually were erected here. Similarly, he had input on the dozens of signs erected in other area counties.

Though the signs are indeed expensive, those erected as long as 36 years ago are still holding up well. That is one more good reason to press on with the program.

History is important in a democracy because it is difficult to understand what we have unless we know something of how we got it. How can anyone really understand this area, for instance, without knowledge of its coal mining past?

The state's historical marker program helps to jog our memories of the past and, sometimes, it increases our appetite for knowledge. The tricentennial addition of a new marker in each of our counties is a welcome addition to a program which, by itself, is making history.